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Patrick Administration Declares June “Rivers Month” in Massachusetts

Kick-off highlights revitalization of Fitchburg’s North Nashua River

FITCHBURG – Overlooking a waterway that once epitomized the effects of industrial pollution but now stands as a shining example of successful river restoration, Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles today read Governor Patrick’s proclamation declaring June “Rivers Month” in Massachusetts to assembled state and local officials and environmental advocates.

Each year, state environmental officials launch Rivers Month at a different riverside location. This year’s kick-off of the month-long celebration took place along the banks of the North Nashua River at Fitchburg’s Riverfront Park.

The vibrant river that served as today’s backdrop stood in stark contrast to the North Nashua of several decades ago. Sometimes taking on the hue of fabric dyes discharged into the river by nearby textile industries, the North Nashua – running red – was once featured on the cover of *National Geographic* to illustrate America’s polluted waterways. State and local officials and environmental advocates celebrated a much-improved river today – thanks in large part to the leadership and stewardship of Marion Stoddart, a founder of the Nashua River Watershed Association and member of the Fitchburg Greenway Committee. Stoddart was honored today with an 80th birthday cake and a copy of the Rivers Month proclamation.

“Like all of the Commonwealth’s rivers, the North Nashua played a key role in shaping its community through history, and it continues to do so today,” said Secretary Bowles. “The park we’re standing in is a testament to the river’s latest role as centerpiece for recreation and urban revitalization in the city of Fitchburg. I’m pleased that the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs has contributed to the North Nashua’s success through grant funding for this park, a riverside trail, and long-term planning for the river’s future.”

The Commonwealth’s 28 major rivers and their tributaries represent some of the richest and most diverse wildlife habitats in Massachusetts. They are also settings for recreational activities such

as canoeing and kayaking, fishing, swimming and bird watching, which contribute to the state's quality of life. Throughout Rivers Month, watershed groups and other organizations offer an array of river-related activities, events and educational programs ranging from paddling trips and biodiversity surveys to riverbank cleanups and water quality testing. The Department of Fish and Game's (DFG) Riverways Program has compiled a comprehensive list of Rivers Month happenings at <http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/river/riversmonth2008.htm>.

"When people from the public and private sectors work together, as they have in Fitchburg, we see the resultant energy that makes things happen," said DFG Commissioner Mary Griffin. "I am pleased with DFG and Riverways' partnership with the Mayor and her staff, the greenway committee, the residents of Fitchburg and the advocates that is resulting in the new pilot river project to improve the river's habitat, flood control and access opportunities."

Both Secretary Bowles and Commissioner Griffin praised Fitchburg Mayor Lisa Wong, her staff, and a partnership of organizations that have raised the public profile of the North Nashua River, ensuring the river's renewed health and encouraging local residents to connect with this resource within their community. State assistance for the city's river-focused revitalization efforts has included \$825,000 in EEA Urban Self Help grants since FY 2002 to purchase land for Riverfront Park – a former brownfield site – and convert it into a centrally located public park. Urban Self Help funding also helped pay for reconstruction of the pedestrian bridge that spans the river.

"We are very proud of the efforts that Fitchburg, the Nashua River Watershed Association, the Fitchburg Greenway Committee and state agencies have undertaken to restore the Nashua River," said state Senator Robert Antonioni. "I take great pleasure in being on the banks of the North Nashua River with all the partners who are working to revitalize the river and the downtown."

"The transformation of the Nashua River has been remarkable, and I would like to thank and congratulate Marion Stoddart and the other groups for their dedication to the river," said state Representative Stephen DiNatale. "The restoration of the Nashua River and improvements to the downtown are critical to the quality of life and the economy of the city."

Additional state funding through DFG's Riverways Program financed a community-wide planning process for a River Master Plan in FY 2004, and, more recently, a pilot project to enhance Riverfront Park through partial removal of a wall to improve river access and instream habitat. EEA's Urban Self Help program has provided a grant to enable the city of Fitchburg to complete the first phase of the Steam Line Trail, envisioned as a riverside trail system along an old steam line right-of-way.

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